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No. 256

WHEN MA TOOK OFFICE

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A Comedy in One Act

BY

G S. SHEPHARD

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When Ma Took Office.

SCENE PLOT.

SCENE I:—*Room in* MRS. BROWN-SMITH'S *residence. Doors (practical)* L. 2 E. *and* R. 3 E. *Window (need not be practical)* R. *Large desk against wall down* R. *piled with letters, petitions, mail of all sorts. Swivel chair facing it. Small desk or table alongside of the other, under window* R., *also piled with mail of various sorts. Straight chair facing it. Table* C. *with chair at* L. *of it. Another chair up* C. *Rocking chair* L. C. *Straight chair down* L. *Telephone on wall up* L. *with directory hanging to hook.*

TIME.—*A week before* MRS. BROWN-SMITH *takes office.*

DISCOVERED AT RISE.—MRS. BROWN-SMITH *at desk down* R. MATHILDE *at smaller desk;* JEANNE *at table* C., *busy with some millinery;* ELIZABETH *answering telephone which rings at* L.

WHEN MA TOOK OFFICE. SCENE I.

ELIZABETH. (*at telephone*) Yes, this is Mrs. Brown-Smith's office. Yes. Yes. Just hold the line, please; I'll see. (*turns to* MRS. BROWN-

SMITH) The Society for the Extension of Humor wants to know if you will make an address at their exercises on the 18th, Ma. It's their third anniversary.

MRS. B.-S. (*distractedly, fumbling over papers*) The 18th? Wasn't there something for the 18th, Tillie?

MATHILDE. (*picking up memorandum book and turning pages*) Eighteenth? No, you can't go, Ma. You're due at the C. C. & M. Club at *2*: 30, and there's a Board Meeting after that, and job-chasers from 5 to 6, and banquet H. H. & H. 7: 30. No, she can't go, Elizabeth.

MRS. B.-S. Tell them I'm *very sorry,* of course.

ELIZABETH. (*at 'phone*) Mrs. Brown-Smith is *very* sorry, but she finds that the 18th is completely filled with engagements. Yes, she regrets it very much. Yes, she *is* in constant demand. Oh, not at all. *Good*-by. (*comes down to table* C., *looks at millinery*)

MRS. B.-S. (*searching distractedly among papers on her desk*) I hope it's nothing important. I don't think it can be. I never heard of that Society before. But of course, I don't want to antagonize any one. But I simply *can't* be everywhere at once. Where *is* that memorandum about that taxation business? I want to get it into my message.

MISS HILLDRETH. (*appearing in doorway* L. 2 E.) Mrs. Brown-Smith, if you are ready for the final fitting——

MRS. B.-S. (*nervously, turning over papers*) Oh, I haven't time to think about *clothes.*

ELIZABETH. Why, the *idea,* Ma!

JEANNE. You've got to *take* time to think about them. Good gracious, Ma! Clothes are the *main thing.*

MRS. B.-S. I *must* finish this message.

MATHILDE. Oh, any one of us can finish the *message* for you, Ma, but you've got to wear your own clothes. Now, do go along, like a good girl, and don't keep Miss Hilldreth waiting. *Her* time is *valuable,* you know.

MRS. B.-S. (*nervously, rising and crossing* L.) *Now don't touch one of those papers.*

(*Exeunt* MISS HILLDRETH *and* MRS. B.-S. L. 2 E. *Telephone rings.* ELIZABETH *moves to answer it.*)

JEANNE. Don't call Ma, whoever it is. We can't pay a dress-maker three dollars a day to be sitting around waiting for Ma to stand off job-chasers.

ELIZABETH. (*at 'phone*) Hello. Mrs. Brown-Smith? No, she isn't here just at present. No, she won't be here for some time. Isn't this Mrs. Jackson talking? Oh, yes. Your sister's application? Yes, I presume she has it. Oh, yes, I'm sure she would be glad to give her a place if she can, but——

MATHILDE. Oh, choke her off, 'Liz'beth. Ma can't furnish jobs for everybody's poor relations. She's got enough of her own.

ELIZABETH. (*at 'phone*) Yes, I'll tell her. Yes, I know she'll be very glad— Yes, she will do what she can I know. Yes— I'll have to ask you to excuse me— Yes— Yes— If you'll excuse me— Yes— Yes— I will. *Good*-by. (*hangs up*) Well, of *all* the persistent creatures!

MATHILDE. The *nerve* of her, asking for the secretaryship! She might know that Ma would appoint one of us.

JEANNE. It sems to me I've read somewhere about there being some law against people in office employing their relations.

MATHILDE. (*energetically*). Well, if there *is,* Ma will have to *repeal* it, that's all. The *idea!* How could Ma act as Mayor without one of us to tell her what to do?

TOMMY. (*breathlessly, poking head in* L. 2 E.) *Ma!* Aunt Jane's coming. (*exit*)

GIRLS. (*simultaneously, going through pantomime of dismay*) *Aunt Jane!*

JEANNE. What on earth——

MATHILDE. Of *all* people! *And just at this time!*

ELIZABETH. (*crossing to* L. 2 E.) S-s-sh! (*aloud*) Why, Aunt Jane! How *do* you do?

(*Enter* AUNT JANE L. 2 E., *followed by* TOMMY, *each dragging a good-sized telescope basket,* AUNT JANE'S *having attached to handle by string a hat done up in paper.* AUNT JANE *is gray-haired and seventy and must wear a suit of style of ten or fifteen years ago, showing wear, and a hat or bonnet showing signs of having been "made over" several times. She must wear black cotton gloves and otherwise look as if she were from the country.*)

JEANNE. (*kissing her*) Why, Aunt Jane! You didn't carry that heavy basket?

MATHILDE. (*crossing* L.) Why didn't you put everything in a trunk and just check it through? (*kisses her*)

AUNT JANE. (*dragging* TOMMY'S *basket to center*) I had to pack 'em separate, because these here are eatables. (*stoops to unstrap it*)

GIRLS. (*in chorus*) *Eatables!*

TOMMY. (*darting toward it*) I'll unstrap it, Aunt Jane. (*sets to work*)

AUNT JANE. Yes, I knew 't your mother was to take office Monday, and I know how it is when

there's a funeral or anything out of the ordinary happens that way in a house, folks don't have time to cook as they ought to, and there's nothing will get the stomach out o' kelter quicker than eatin' scrap meals. So I baked up a half dozen mince pies. (TOMMY *has cover off of basket and she takes them out and sets on table, also other articles as she names them*) I'd have made some berry pies, only I was afraid of their runnin' out. And here's a boiled ham. (*articles can be done up in napkins or white paper so as not to show, if necessary*) That's just about as good a stand-by as anything when it comes to cold victuals. And then I fried up a couple o' pound o' sausage. They're real tasty, especially when you have your own garden sage to season 'em with.

JEANNE. (*snatching up her millinery work and going through pantomime of dismay*) Tell Nora to come and get these things, Mathilde. You really shouldn't have gone to all this trouble, Aunt Jane. (*exit* MATHILDE R. 3 E.)

(TOMMY *takes paper bag from basket, peers into it, draws out cooky and eats.*)

AUNT JANE. Oh, 'twan't any particular trouble. Yes, I made those cookies specially for you, Tommy, but you'd better not eat them all at one clip.

MATHILDE. (*re-entering* R. 3 E.) I forgot this was Nora's afternoon off. I'll carry them out. (*she and* ELIZABETH *begin to carry out things* R. 3 E. TOMMY *saunters out* R. 3 E. *with bag of cookies*)

(*Enter* MRS. B.-S. L. 2 E., *dressed in handsome gown.*)

MRS. B.-S. (*looking down at dress as she comes*

in and picking thread off of sleeve) What do you think of it, girls? (*looks up, stops transfixed*) Why, Aunt Jane!

AUNT JANE. (*pausing in the business of unwrapping paper from loaf of frosted cake*) My, Sary Ann! Is that your coronation gown? Turn round slow. (MRS. B.-S. *revolves*) My! It's too bad you was short o' goods. It would be real elegant if there was enough to it. (*moves nearer to her. Stops suddenly, looking at cake*) There! I guess I better not get too close. This frostin's kinda sticky, I see, after all. I made it in a terrible hurry.

ELIZABETH. (*holding ham aloft*) Aunt Jane brought provisions enough to last a week.

AUNT JANE. Yes, as I sez to Mis. Haskell, time old man Slocum died, "Folks come to sympathize," sez I, "but they stay to eat." And 'tis so. You see, they had to delay the fun'ral, on account of one of the boys' comin' from Texas, and I declare, the sympathizers pretty near et Mis. Slocum out of house and home before they finally did get the old man buried.

JEANNE. (*laughing*) Well, of course, this isn't exactly a *funeral,* Aunt Jane.

AUNT JANE. No, but it's on the same order for upsettin' things.

JEANNE. (*examining* MRS. B.-S.'s *dress*) That gown is simply *swell,* Ma. There's some class to that.

MATHILDE. Nobody can say that you are not well *groomed,* at any rate.

AUNT JANE. It's queer how they've took to groomin' *folks* lately, ain't it? It used to be that only horses was *groomed.*

MRS. B.-S. Well, if everything is satisfactory, I'll take the thing off. I must get back to my work.

Girls, make Aunt Jane comfortable, won't you. I'll be back in a moment, Aunt Jane. (*Exit* L. 2 E.)

ELIZABETH. (*who has been passing in and out* R. 3 E., *with things, re-entering*) What *has* become of Nora?

MATHILDE. Why, I told you she wanted the afternoon off, and Ma let her go. You know we have to handle Nora with gloves now.

ELIZABETH. The *wretch!* When she knows how busy we are.

AUNT JANE. (*taking off hat and coat*) Now, don't you worry a bit, girls. I wore my second-best dress a-purpose so that I could just roll up my sleeves and pitch in, if it was necessary, without feeling skittish about spoilin' my clothes.

JEANNE. (*taking her hat and coat*) Oh, that won't be at all necessary, Aunt Jane. Just sit down and make yourself comfortable. Tommy can answer the door, and Nora will be back in time to get dinner. Tommy, come and take Aunt Jane's basket up-stairs.

(AUNT JANE *sits* L. C.)

TOMMY. (*entering* R. 3 E., *munching cooky and cramming others into his pocket*) I ain't agoing to hang around all day to answer the bell for a lot o' job-chasers. I gotta go over to Hill's back lot to practice.

ELIZABETH. Practice *what?*

TOMMY. Pitchin', o' course. We gotta game against the Roarin' Reds next Sat'day.

ELIZABETH. (*severely*) Well, you'll not practice any base ball to-day. You'll stay right here and attend the door. The idea of the only gentleman in the family deserting us just when we need his services so badly.

TOMMY. (*dragging basket slowly toward* L. 2 E.) What's the use o' bein' the only gen'leman in the family when you all 'a' got the vote? (*pauses in doorway*) Say, who's Ma goin' to put in for supe, any way?

MATHILDE. Superintendent of Schools? She hasn't decided yet.

TOMMY. Well, she needn't go and run in any old hen on us, I can tell you that. Us boys won't stand for it.

MATHILDE and JEANNE. (*simultaneously*) Tommy!

ELIZABETH. Thomas Reynoldson Brown-Smith! I'm *amazed* at you. (TOMMY *darts out* L. 2 E.)

ELIZABETH. (*crossing to* L. 2 E. *and calling after him*) Tommy! *Tommy!* Remember, you are to answer the bell if it rings; and Tommy, don't bring any one in here without coming first and telling us who it is. Do you hear?

TOMMY. (*voice in distance*) Yes, I hear.

AUNT JANE. (*fumbling in bag for spectacles*) If you've got any darnin' or mendin' you want done, girls, just get it out. (*takes out spectacles and polishes them with handkerchief*)

MATHILDE. (*at desk*) Oh, we are too busy with official business to think of darning or mending, Aunt Jane.

(ELIZABETH *and* JEANNE *must adjust themselves suitably,* JEANNE *returning to her millinery,* ELIZABETH *perhaps standing at table looking over materials.*)

AUNT JANE. (*putting on spectacles and drawing crocheting from bag*) Well, I'll go on with my crochet, then. I always carry it with me, for it's the

hardest work in the world for me to sit and hold my hands.

TOMMY. (*poking his head in* L. 2 E.) Mrs. Thatcher and Mrs. Weston are coming up the steps. (*bell rings*)

MATHILDE. Well, show them in here. Elizabeth, you might tell Ma. (*exeunt* TOMMY L. 2 E., ELIZABETH R. 3 E.)

JEANNE. (*gathering up millinery hastily*) They mustn't see this home-made millinery. (*exit hastily* R. 3 E.)

(*Enter* MRS. THATCHER *and* MRS. WESTON L. 2 E., *dressed very richly.*

MATHILDE. *So* glad to see you. Mrs. Thatcher and Mrs. Weston of the Celerity Club, Aunt Jane. Mother's aunt, Miss Brown, of Brownsville, ladies.

AUNT JANE. Howdy do? Howdy do? (*Shakes hands with each*)

MRS. THATCHER. (*As they seat themselves*) You came down for the inauguration, I suppose, Miss Brown?

AUNT JANE. Yes'm. This is the first time anybody in our family ever got elected to anything as far back as I can remember, so I thought 'twas wuth coming to. Now that I speak of it, though, it kinda runs in my head that old Uncle Simeon Brown did get to be constable once. I believe he did. He was always runnin' for something.

(*Enter* MRS. B.-S. L. 2 E.)

MRS. B.-S. Oh, Mrs. Thatcher! *So* glad to see you. And Mrs. Weston, too. (*Shakes hands and crosses to desk* R.) I'm just working on my Message, and I shall be so glad to have your suggestions.

MRS. THATCHER. Hem! (*moves chair closer to desk*) Yes, certainly, but just now it seems as if the most important matter was the, er, *appointments*.

MRS. B.-S. (*faintly*) Oh, yes.

MRS. THATCHER. (*taking list from her bag and adjusting her lorgnette*) Of course, the Celerity Club is not expecting you to give us *all* the offices. We understand that you have other obligations.

MRS. WESTON. Tho' naturally, those obligations would be less than to your *own Club,* whose members worked for you to a *man;*—that is, of course, to a *woman*.

MRS. B.-S. Yes, yes, certainly, I, er, appreciate, er——

MRS. THATCHER. But, as I say, we propose to be reasonable. That's one thing that the Celerity Club has always stood for, especially during *my* administrations: reasonableness and moderation. Now, all that we want (*adjusting lorgnette and reading from list*) are the Police Commissioners, the Fire Commissioners, the Board of Public Works, Commissioners of Public Health and Safety, Playground Commissioners, the Board of Health and the Board of Education. (*folds list*) As you see, we're not asking for any of the *minor* offices at all.

MRS. WESTON. (*remindingly*) And about any new commissions that might be formed, Mrs. Thatcher— You know we spoke of that.

MRS. THATCHER. Oh, yes. In the event of any *new* Commissions being created, Mrs. Brown-Smith, the Celerity Club would naturally expect a major representation on them.

MRS. B.-S. (*nervously*) You understand that I am a member of the Cerulean and Busy Bee Clubs, also, and naturally——

MRS. THATCHER. (*grandly*) Naturally you would give them some of the *minor* offices, certainly.

(*unfolds another paper*) Now, here is the list of Commissioners we have prepared. (*adjusts her lorgnette and prepares to read*)

TOMMY. (*excitedly, poking head in* L. 2 E.) Say, Ma, old Mugdub Parker just got off the car at the corner. He's headed fer here, all right.

MATHILDE. (*explaining*) Parker, the School Superintendent.

MRS. THATCHER. (*energetically*) Thank heaven we can oust *him* at last. The way that man has *refused* to get out of office——

MRS. WESTON. It's *perfectly scandalous.*

MRS. B.-S. I can't see him now. Tell him I can't possibly see him, Tommy.

TOMMY. Aw! That won't phase Mugdub. He'll sit in the hall and wait.

MATHILDE. Well, don't answer the bell, Tommy. We can't be bothered with him.

TOMMY. That won't cut any figure neither. He'll go round the back way. (*bell rings. They stare at each other*)

TOMMY. (*with sudden inspiration*) I'll sic the dog on him. (*rushes out*)

MRS. B.-S. (*starting up, calling*) *Thomas!*

MATHILDA. (*rushing to* L. 2 E.) Tom-*mee!*

(*Sound of door slamming and dog barking.*)

MATHILDE. (*rushing to window* R.) Oh, dear! Ha, ha, ha! Oh, poor Mr. Parker! Ha, ha, ha! (*ladies crowd around window laughing*)

AUNT JANE. (*standing peering over her spectacles, crocheting in hand*) Well, at any rate, he *can* move when he's made to.

MRS. THATCHER. (*as all re-seat themselves*) Well, he will certainly move out of office if *I* have any voice in the matter; and a lot of other old fix-

tures besides. Now, this list, Mrs. Brown-Smith—(*takes up list*)

TOMMY. (*bursting in* L. 1 E., *breathlessly*) Say, Ma, Mrs. Carter and another lady got in the side door while I was chasin' old Mug.

MRS. THATCHER. (*rising hastily*) Mrs. Carter! Can't we retire to another room, Mrs. Brown-Smith? These appointments should be fixed up without delay.

MRS. B.-S. (*rising*) Yes, certainly, Mathilde——

MATHILDE. (*throwing open door* R. 3 E.) This way, ladies. Tommy, shut that door a minute. Hurry, Ma. (TOMMY *closes door* L. 2 E., *exeunt* MRS. THATCHER, MRS. WESTON, MRS. B.-S. *and* MATHILDE *precipitately* R. 3 E.)

(*Knock at door* L. 2 E. TOMMY *opens it and* MRS. CARTER *enters, followed by* MRS. JURGENS. *Exit* TOMMY. MRS. CARTER *is an extremely nervous little woman, with quick, jerky manner of speaking, is dressed for street, carrying veil, gloves, bag, and perhaps little package. Drops one or other of them frequently, and must go through other appropriate "business" to sustain the character during her long speeches.*)

MRS. CARTER. (*advancing*) Why, how do you do, Miss Brown? (*they shake hands*) My friend Mrs. Jurgens, Miss Brown. I just ran in the side door same as usual. I knew Sarah wouldn't care.

AUNT JANE. Who has shaken hands with Mrs. *Jurgens during this*) Take seats, won't you?

(MRS. JERGENS *sits in* JEANNE'S *chair little up* C., AUNT JANE L. C., MRS. CARTER L.)

MRS. CARTER. I *thought* I saw you come in, but I wa'n't real sure of it; there's so many running here now since Sarah was elected Mayor. My land! I should think she'd be crazy with all the confusion. (*door* R. 3 E. *opens slightly*)

AUNT JANE. She *does* seem real nervous and wore out.

MRS. CARTER. (*signaling surreptitiously to* MRS. JURGENS *to look toward* R. 3 E.) I should think she would, with everybody she knows either wantin' a job, or trying to tell her how to run her own job.

(*Door* R. 3 E. *opens little further,* AUNT JANE *counts her stitches,* MRS. CARTER *motions still more vigorously to* MRS. JURGENS, *nodding toward* R. 3 E., MRS. JURGENS *makes nervous attempt to shift her position, watching* AUNT JANE *timidly the while*)

MRS. CARTER. (*while this is going on*) I told Emily I didn't know as it was any use to come over, for I saw Marcia Thatcher goin' in here an hour or more ago, and I hadn't seen her go *out,* and as I says, "If Marcia Thatcher's got the field," says I, "you know what to expect."

AUNT JANE. (*mildly, looking up*) You ladies in politics? (MRS. JURGENS *whirls about nervously without being able to see through* R. 3 E.)

MRS. CARTER. No, we are *not.* At least, *I'm* not, Mrs. Jurgens' husband being Chief of Police, of course she *has* to be, to a certain extent.

AUNT JANE. (*turning to* MRS. JURGENS) Your husband's Chief of Police, is he?

MRS. CARTER. (*who has been twisting and straining furtively to see through* R. 3 E., *catching sight of telephone*) Excuse me, I want to look at your telephone book a minute. (*goes up, takes telephone di-*

dectory, dropping gloves as she does so, but does not look at book. Instead, twists and maneuvers, peering eagerly through widening crack of door R. 3 E. *Door is shut suddenly.* MRS. *C. nods in triumph, returns book to hook, sees gloves, picks them up, crosses* R. *and comes down*)

MRS. JURGENS. (*during this pantomime*) Yes'm. Of course, it's not just on account of my husband's losing his job that I don't like the idea of a woman being Chief, but——

MRS. CARTER. (*coming down* R. C.) If women was any different from men, you might do something; but they ain't a particle. There's just as many bosses among women as there are among men. And when it comes right down to it, if I've got to be bossed at all, I'd rather be bossed by a man than a woman, any day. (*during this she stands down* C. *trying to put on her gloves and finding the fingers are wrong side out, turns them, stretching them and shaking them out, etc., while she talks*)

MRS. JURGENS. That's what I've always said.

MRS. CARTER. Now, of course, it's none of my business—that is, in one way it ain't and in another way it is, seeing that I'm a voter—but everybody that knows anything at all knows that Marcia Thatcher is a *regular boss.* I don't know how she was as a girl, because I didn't know her then, but she's bossed her husband ever since they were married; and as far as the Celerity Club's concerned, why the Celerity Club *is* Marcia Thatcher. She's the *whole thing.* That's the reason I got out of it. I just couldn't stand it. No matter who's president, she rules. And of course, I wouldn't say it to everybody, but there's a lot of talk going round, and as far as I can hear and, hem! *see,* I must say that it

does look as if she was goin' to rule the Mayor's office too.

AUNT JANE. The Brown family ain't much given to lettin' other folks run 'em, Miss Carter.

MRS. CARTER. (*still working with gloves, and finally drawing them on*) Well, I don't know. Sarah's been bossed so long by her children that she ain't as strong as she might be. You know it kind of takes the snap out of you to have your children start in to rule you when they ain't got beyond spanking age, as you might say. I know how it is myself, and of course, I'm not blaming Sarah so much; though I must say, as far as the principle's concerned, I don't see as there's much difference between these back-room saloon conferences that they talk about the men politicians havin', and an executive session o' women politicians in the kitchen. It's all the same in the long run. It ain't so much *where* the bosses get in their work as it is that they get it *in*. Come on, Emily, we might as well be goin'. There ain't a mite o' use of hanging 'round here as long as Marcia Thatcher's got the field.

Good-by, Miss Brown. (*shakes hands with* MISS BROWN) Now, you run in real often while you're here. And don't think that I've got anything personal against Sarah. Land o' love! We've been neighbors for twenty years, and it would take more than politics to turn me against Sarah. Besides, I ain't *in* politics. That's the reason I'm free to speak my mind. And I *will* say, just as I've said right along, that you take it by and large, there ain't any difference between men and women when they've got an axe to grind. Not a bit. Come, Emily, if we're going to match that silk, we'd better get started.

(During this last, MRS. JURGENS *shakes hands with*

AUNT JANE *and now follows* MRS. CARTER *out* L. 2 E.)

AUNT JANE. (*staring after them*) Well, I declare, Mrs. Carter's just as wound up as ever. Seems like anybody that can talk as fast and as steady as that ought to take to the stump.

(*Enter* MRS. B.-S. *cautiously* R. 3 E.)

MRS. B.-S. Mrs. Carter gone? (*comes down and sits at desk*)

AUNT JANE. Yes. She had the Chief of Police's wife with her. Where's Mrs. Thatcher and her friend?

MRS. B.-S. They went out the back way.

AUNT JANE. My land, Sary Ann! I wouldn't take to sneaking folks out the back way, whatever I did.

MRS. B.-S. (*wearily*) They didn't want an encounter with Mrs. Carter. Aunt Jane, if this keeps up, I shall never live to take office; *never*. (*swings about, puts elbows on desk and head in hands*)

(*Enter* TOMMY L. 2 E.)

TOMMY. Here's Mrs. Norman, Ma, and here's a note the boy says has got to have an answer right away. (*hands her note*)

(*Enter* MRS. NORMAN L. 2 E. *She is shabby and a little hesitating in manner*)

MRS. B.-S. (*advancing to meet her*) Why, how do you do, Annie? You remember Aunt Jane, of course? It's Annie Norman, Aunt Jane. (*they shake hands*)

MRS. B.-S. Sit down, Annie, and excuse me just a moment, please, till I see what this is. (*She opens note while* MRS. NORMAN *seats herself down* L. *Reads*) Dear Mrs. Brown-Smith: The dedication of the Carrington Infants' Home will have to be held on the 11th instead of the 18th as we had planned, on account of Mrs. Carrington's being called unexpectedly to the East. I do hope the change won't prevent your being with us. Please answer by bearer, as we are counting so much on your address. Yours anxiously,

MARY HUNTINGTON, Chairman.

MRS. B.-S. (*turning to* MATHILDE, *who has come in during the reading, bowed to* MRS. NORMAN, *and stands at her own desk listening*) The 11th. Is there anything special for the 11th, Mathilde? (*Sits at desk*)

MATHILDE. (*picking up memorandum book and turning pages*) The 11th? Well, I *guess*. (*reads*) "See French Commissioners off 8:30 A. M., Welcome B and A Delegates 9:30, Job Chasers 10 to 11, Review Parade of G. & G. 11:30, Common Weal Club Luncheon 12:30, Dedication Humane Fountain 2, Opening C. C. & M. Club 3, Board Meeting 4 to 5, Job Chasers 5 to 6, Banquet R. A. G. U'S 7:30. (*closes book*) You can't get it in, Ma.

MRS. B.-S. Well, write her to that effect and I will sign it. (MATHILDE *writes note*)

MRS. NORMAN. Gracious, Sarah! I don't envy you bein' mayor.

MRS. B.-S. *Envy* me! I deserve the pity of my bitterest enemy.

MRS. NORMAN. It's not only having to run around to these banquets and dedications and things, but I suppose everybody and their relations are after you for a job.

MRS. B.-S. (*signing note and giving it to* TOMMY *who goes out with it* L. 2 E.) My dear, I didn't suppose it was possible for such a diversity of people to be so absolutely qualified for the same identical job as there seems to be, according to their friends.

MRS. NORMAN. (*plucking uneasily at her dress and showing other signs of nervousness*) I know, folks will say anything; and I'm just as bad as the rest. I've come about Sister Liza's husband, Jim Romaine. You know, he's been in the Tax Collector's office goin' on ten years now, and my land, Sarah! He's just got to be kept there, if there's any way of doin' it. He ain't fit for anything else. You see, he's the kind of a man that if anybody'd set him right down to a job, he'd do it just as faithful as he knew how. He's jest as steady as an old horse; but he's that kind that 'ud never get anything in Kingdom Come if he had to rustle for it himself. It ain't in him. He ain't got a particle of get up, and never did have; and of course, he's gettin' older all the time.

MRS. B.-S. Of course, you understand, Annie——

MRS. NORMAN. (*interrupting hurriedly*) I know how it is, and I just hate to pester you, Sarah, but I ain't runnin' after any *big* office, and this here's a matter of life or death, as you might say. (*sits on edge of chair and twists her hands still more nervously*) You know Laura's husband's been out o' work for nearly a year now. We've got them on our hands, and now if Jim gets out and we have to be puttin' our hands in our pockets to help them, too!—And the way times are!—Well, we'd just have to give up, that's all. We'd just simply all land in the *Poorhouse*.

TOMMY. (*appearing* L. 2 E.) Ma, the massage lady's here.

MATHILDE. (*rising hastily and looking at her watch*) Gracious! Ma, it's after five o'clock. You must go right away. You will excuse her, won't you, Mrs. Norman? The banquet's at seven, Ma. You haven't a moment to lose.

MRS. B.-S. I'll make a note of Mr. Romaine, Annie. (*scrawls*: "JIM ROMAINE, *Tax Collector's Office*. ANNIE NORMAN")

MATHILDE. You *must* come, Ma.

MRS. B.-S. (*rising and gently pushed by* MATHILDE *toward* L. 2 E.) I'll do what I can, Annie.

MRS. NORMAN. (*nervously, rising*) There's never been any complaint about him. He does his work right.

MRS. B.-S. (*at* L. 2 E.) Yes, yes. Don't hurry, Annie. Stay and visit with Aunt Jane. I'm sorry——

MATHILDE. (*pushing her out*) Mrs. Norman will excuse us. Ma has so *much* on her hands, you know, Mrs. Norman. (*exit* L. 2 E.)

MRS. NORMAN. (*staring after them*) My! Sarah's broke terrible, hasn't she, just in these few weeks? I don't know how she's goin' to stand it when she really gets to *be* Mayor. But I suppose she can afford to keep massaged up so it won't show so plain. There's a good deal in that. (*sighs deeply*) Well, I do hope she can keep Jim in his place. Land knows, livin's hard enough, just for yourselves, let alone having to think about your relations. (*moves toward* L. 2 E. AUNT JANE *rises*) Don't get up, Miss Brown. I can find my way out.

AUNT JANE. (*laying work and bag on table and following her*) I'd just as lieve stir 'round a little. I ain't used to settin' and holdin' my hands. (*exeunt* L. 2 E.)

(*Re-enter* AUNT JANE L. 2 E. *She goes to table and puts work and spectacles in bag.*)

TOMMY. (*entering* L. 2 E.) Nora says dinner's ready, Aunt Jane, and Ma says will you please excuse her and the girls, because they have to go to the banquet. And say, Aunt Jane, you tell Nora you'll cut the pie, will you, and give me a good *big* piece. I hate these dinky little— (*exeunt* L. 2 E.)

(*Lights lower.*)

(*Re-enter* ELIZABETH *in evening dress and coat. She turns on the lights. Lights up.*)

ELIZABETH. (*calling*) Come on in here, Ma, and let's see if you are all right.

(*Enter* MRS. B.-S. *in evening gown, followed by* MATHILDE *and* JEANNE *in same, and* AUNT JANE *with* MRS. B.-S.'s *coat over her arm.*)

ELIZABETH. Let's see if you are all right, Ma. (*girls cluster around her, adjusting drapery or trimming of dress, ornaments in hair, etc.* AUNT JANE *looks on interestedly. Sound of motor outside*)

JEANNE. (*snatching coat from* AUNT JANE *and putting it on her mother*) There's the car now. You're all right, Ma. You look perfectly swell.

MATHILDE. (*adjusting scarf over her head*) Now, you know what you're going to say, Ma?

MRS. B.-S. (*nervously*) Yes, yes.

ELIZABETH. Don't go in *too* strong on Woman Suffrage, Ma. You know——

MATHILDE. And don't try to *quote* anything, Ma. You know you always get mixed up.

JEANNE. (*at* L. 2 E.) Do come along. We'll be late yet. (*exit* JEANNE)

MRS. B.-S. (*moving toward* L. 2 E.) Good-night, Aunt Jane. Don't sit up for us.

ELIZABETH. (*following her*) No, don't sit up, Aunt Jane. And, Ma, don't try to be *funny;* and— (*exeunt* MRS. B.-S. *and* ELIZABETH L. 2 E.)

MATHILDE. (*hurrying after them*) And, Ma, don't tell any of those old-time stories about when you were a girl, and— (*exit* L. 2 E.)

AUNT JANE. (*looking after them, drawing long breath*) Well, it's a kind of a satisfaction to be an old maid, after all, and be able to say your own say.

(*She draws rocking-chair down* C. *in front of table, adjusts glasses and takes up crocheting. Crochets for a time, yawns, hands slacken, nods gently, then with jerk which arouses her.*)

AUNT JANE. (*straightening and gripping crocheting more firmly*) I b'lieve that mince pie's layin' kind of heavy on my stomach. (*crochets vigorously for awhile, then more slowly, nods gently, recovers herself, nods again, recovers herself, nods more gently, crocheting drops from her hands, she leans back in chair asleep*)

(*Lights gradually lower and out.*)

CURTAIN.

SCENE II.

AUNT JANE DREAMS.

SCENE:—*A rostrum down* R. (*may be made of desk and table pushed together or any way convenient. Chairs arranged in semi-cicle facing rostrum with aisle to give effect of theatre or public hall. If possible a gauze curtain between rostrum and stage auditorium to give more visionary effect.*

Discovered at rise, AUNT JANE *mounted on rostrum, audience seated in stage auditorium, mostly women, only about four men.*

AUNT JANE. Fellow citizens, I s'pose you've all heard that the Mayoress was struck with nervous prostration just after she was sworn in, so she ain't able to give you a speech, but bein' as I'm her nearest blood relative, and bein' as the folks up to Brownville where I live say'at they're bound to elect me for Mayor up there next year, why I've been kind of taking notes and writin' a message of my own, and as long as you've took the trouble to come out, and there ain't anybody else to make a speech, why, I'll give you my idees, if you like. (*applause and laughter from stage audience and cries of "go on."*)

AUNT JANE. First off, I'm goin' to have a law passed for the protection of folks that's elected to office. There's got to be a fund set aside to provide a kind of a cage with padded walls, or some arrangement that'll prevent any sound gettin' to it, where folks that's elected to office can lock theirselves in

durin' the time between their election and the date they take office, and get away from their relations and job-chasers long enough to give their own ideas a chance to collect as to what they're goin' into office *for*. (*applause and laughter from stage audience*)

AUNT JANE. Another fund's to be set aside to provide a public playground big enough to contain a kind of a gladiators' circus, where all the folks that's got opposite views about how to run the Mayor's office can fight it out between theirselves, while the Mayor's in his cage, usin' what sense the Almighty has give him to work out his own idees. (*applause and nods of approval from stage audience*)

AUNT JANE. That playground bein' for the use of everybody, there's to be trees planted every so far apart, and anybody that's got any "ism" or "ology" or any idee that he thinks is goin' to be the salvation of the world, can get a permit to orate under a partic'lar tree, same as they do in Boston Common, and all the folks that want to listen to that partic'lar oration can gather 'round that tree, and them that want the next man's idee 'round the next tree, and so on. And bein' out of doors, the hot air and cold air will mingle, and nobody'll be any the worse. (*applause from audience*)

This being a Commission form of government, in addition to the reg'lar Commissions, I'm going to advocate some new ones for the sake of the general health and morals of the community; such, for instance, as a Commission to see that women's hats are made somewhere within a reasonable approximation of the size of their heads, so's't it won't be necessary to wear a bushel or so of extry false hair to make 'em fit, and women needn't take up more'n their share o' room in the street cars.

(*Great applause from men in audience, one springing up and throwing up his hat, another waving handkerchief. Women ushers rush down and crush them into their seats, women glower and threaten them.*)

AUNT JANE. A Commission to see that men give their wives half their salaries each month, so's't the women can quit getting cash from their grocers and chargin' it to " Sundries " in the monthly account.

(*Women in stage audience applaud vigorously, wave handkerchiefs, etc. Men shrink dejectedly in their seats.*)

AUNT JANE. A Commission to see that women's clothes are made so that they can hook them up theirselves, or else pay a fine to the fund for overworked husbands.

(*Men in audience spring up, wave hats and handkerchiefs, cheer, and otherwise express their delight. Women ushers rush down, run one man out, the women in audience crush others into their seats, scowl, threaten them with their parasols, etc.*)

AUNT JANE. I ain't got them all just fixed in my mind yet, but there's one that I think is probably the most important of all, and the one that will do the most good, and that is the Commission to investigate watered incomes. To see that folks live down to what they've actually got, and not up to what other folks *think* they've got.

(*The whole audience rises in revolt, men and women*

hiss, shake their fists, canes, parasols at her, shout, "Recall!" "Recall!"

AUNT JANE. (*above the tumult*) The band will now play "My Country 'tis of Thee, Sweet Land of Liberty," to wind up.

(*Orchestra plays "America", stage audience disperses, shaking their heads threateningly at* AUNT JANE, *lights gradually lower and out. Music continues to play softly.*)

CURTAIN.

(*Music continues to play softly, curtain rises, discovering* AUNT JANE *asleep in rocking-chair in front of table. Music dies away.*)

AUNT JANE. (*rousing with start and staring around her*) I declare! I b'lieve I dozed off.

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